

Message Text

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70

ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5016

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 0886

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: VN, AS, PINT, PDIP, PFOR

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S VIEWS ON VIET-NAM

REF: CANBERRA 857

1. SUMMARY: IN COURSE OF DEBATE ON PRG REPRESENTATION
ISSUE AT AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE FEB 7 (REFTEL)
PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM EXPRESSED HIS VIEWS ON VIET-NAM WITH
PERHAPS GREATER CLARITY THAN EVER BEFORE. HE WAS AT HIS
MAGISTERIAL BEST IN OUTLINING CONSIDERATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL
LAW AND AUSTRALIAN INTERESTS WHICH REQUIRE CONTINUED RE-
COGNITION OF GVN AS LONG AS IT CONTINUES TO CONTROL SAIGON.
HE WAS AT HIS WORST IN EXPRESSING AN UNVARNISHED HOPE FOR
EARLY DEMISE OF NON-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT IN SVN, EXPRESSING
NO CONCERN WHATEVER FOR TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES SUCH DEVELOPMENT
WOULD BRING. IN LAST ANALYSIS, ONLY EVENTS, INCLUDING CON-
TINUED SURVIVAL OF THIEU GOVERNMENT OR NON-COMMUNIST GOVERN-
MENT ESSENTIALLY LIKE IT, WILL HAVE ANY IMPACT ON WHITLAM.
EMBASSY BELIEVES DFA PROFESSIONALS DO NOT PARTICULARLY SHARE
WHITLAM'S ANTI-GVN VIEWS AND ARE NOT PREPARED TO PREDICT
EARLY DEMISE OF GVN. HOWEVER, THEY WILL PROBABLY HAVE
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ONLY MODEST IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN POLICY TOWARDS VIET-NAM

IN COMING MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN COURSE OF DEBATE AT LABOR PARTY FEDERAL CONFERENCE FEB 7 WHICH LED TO APPROVAL OF RESOLUTION TO ALLOW PRG TO ESTABLISH OFFICE IN AUSTRALIA SIMILAR TO PRG OFFICES IN SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES (REFTEL), PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM GAVE HIS VIEWS ON SITUATION IN SOUTH VIET-NAM AT SOME LENGTH. EMBASSY REPORTS THEM IN DETAIL, AS THEY UNDERLINE MAGNITUDE OF PROBLEM WE FACE IN MAKING ANY IMPACT ON GOA ON VIET-NAM AS LONG AS WHITLAM AND LABOR PARTY ARE IN OFFICE.

3. WHITLAM INITIALLY INTRODUCED LABOR PLATFORM COMMITTEE REPORT WHICH UNEQUIVOCALLY RECOMMENDED REJECTION OF MOTION INTRODUCED BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CAIRNS WHICH CALLED FOR GRANTING FULL DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION TO PRG. HOWEVER, HE ALSO EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR AMENDMENT ULTIMATELY ADOPTED, WHICH WAS INTRODUCED WITH HIS APPROVAL AND PERHAPS AT HIS REQUEST, TO ALLOW PRG TO OPEN AN OFFICE IN AUSTRALIA.

4. WHITLAM NOTED THAT DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION DOES NOT RPT NOT IMPLY APPROVAL OF REGIME. MOST GOVERNMENTS IN WORLD DO NOT MEET WITH APPROVAL OF GOA, BUT AUSTRALIA MUST DEAL WITH OTHER COUNTRIES REGARDLESS OF WHAT GOA THINKS OF THEIR GOVERNMENT. IN SOUTH VIET-NAM, NO QUESTION THAT ANYONE AT LABOR CONFERENCE APPROVES OF THIEU GOVERNMENT, EITHER AT PRESENT TIME OR IN TERMS OF ITS PREDECESSORS FOR SOME DECADES PAST. AUSTRALIANS HAVE COMMERCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN REASONS FOR GOING TO SAIGON, AND ESSENTIAL THAT GOA BE IN CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT WHICH, BY EVEN CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE, MUST BE CONSIDERED TO CONTROL AT LEAST 10 MILLION PEOPLE IN SVN. WHITLAM SAID HE ACCEPTS PROPOSITION THAT VIET-NAM SHOULD BE ONE, BUT SO SHOULD KOREA. IN FACT, THERE IS NO REGIME IN KOREA OR VIET-NAM WHICH CONTROLS THE WHOLE COUNTRY. AMENDMENT TO LABOR PLATFORM PRESENTED BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CAIRNS CALLING FOR DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION OF PRG PROBABLY INTENDS EQUAL DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION FOR TWO GOVERNMENTS IN SVN. THERE IS NO WAY IN WHICH THIS CAN BE DONE. AUSTRALIA CAN HAVE RELATIONS WITH ONE OR THE OTHER, BUT NOT BOTH.

5. WHITLAM CONTINUED THAT GOA HAS RELATIONS WITH GOVERN-
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MENT WHICH CONTROLS THE CAPITAL. GOA IS POISED TO MAKE CHANGES IN PATTERN OF DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION IN CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIET-NAM WHEN CONTROL OF CAPITAL CHANGES. GOA WILL RETAIN ITS EMBASSIES IN PLACE IN EVENT OF CHANGE.

6. AT LATER STAGE OF DEBATE, IN REPLY TO OTHER SPEAKERS, WHITLAM SAID AUSTRALIAN OBJECTIVES IN VIET-NAM ARE: 1) TO DO ALL IT CAN TO SEE VIET-NAM PACIFIED; 2) TO DO ALL IT CAN TO SEE

VIET-NAM REHABILITATED. IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR AUSTRALIA TO DO ALL IT CAN TO BRING PEACE AND REHABILITATION IF GOA IS OUT OF SAIGON. WHITLAM SAID THAT AT TIME OF LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE OF 1973 HE THOUGHT THIEU REGIME WOULD BE OUT OF POWER BEFORE NEXT LABOR CONFERENCE, BUT IN FACT IT REMAINS IN POWER. QTE. I WOULD EXPECT IT WOULD BE OUT OF POWER BEFORE THE NEXT ALP CONFERENCE, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF THIS WILL HAPPEN. END QTE. HE ADDED, QTE. I HOPE IT WILL BE OUT OF POWER BY THE NEXT CONFERENCE. END QTE. MEANWHILE, WHITLAM NOTED THAT GOA HAS PROVIDED A\$70 THOUSAND FOR CONSTRUCTION OF HOSPITAL AND A\$1.25 MILLION TO ICRC FOR RELIEF PURPOSES IN PRG AREA. AUSTRALIA HAS INFORMAL CONTACTS WITH PRG IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND IT HAS CONTACT IN QTE. UP-COUNTRY CAMBODIA AND PEKING END QTE. WITH THE GRUNK AND THE KHMER ROUGE. WHITLAM EMPHASIZED IMPORTANCE OF TIMING IN MOVING TOWARDS RECOGNITION OF INSURGENT REGIME. FIRST STEP IS INFORMAL CONTACT IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, FOLLOWED ULTIMATE DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION WHEN MOMENT IS RIGHT. HE NOTED THIS WAS POLICY FOLLOWED BY GOA IN RELATION TO RECOGNITION OF GUINEA-BISSAU.

7. SHORTLY BEFORE VOTE WHITLAM TOOK NOTE OF RESOLUTION ON PRG OFFICE WHICH ULTIMATELY PASSED BY CONFERENCE AS QTE. DESIRABLE TREND AND ONE WHICH WOULD TAKE PLACE EVEN IF THE FEDERAL CONFERENCE DID NOT PASS IT. END QTE.

8. COMMENT: WHITLAM COMMENTS ON PRG ISSUE BROUGHT OUT PERHAPS THE BEST AND THE WORST IN HIM. IN SPEAKING OF THE POLITICAL REALITIES AND THE NEED TO MAKE AUSTRALIAN RECOGNITION POLICY CONFORM TO THEM, HE WAS AT HIS MAGISTERIAL BEST IN DEALING WITH CONSIDERATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL INTEREST. ON THE LIKELY FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIET-NAM, HOWEVER, HE WAS AT HIS WORST. VIET-NAM ISSUE TRAUMATIZED LABOR PARTY FOR EXTENDED PERIOD IN 1960'S AND, AS RECONFIDENTIAL

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SULT OF STRONG OPPOSITION ALP VOICED TO AUSTRALIAN COMMITMENT TO THE GVN, PARTY HAS HELD OUT OF POWER FOR PERHAPS FIVE OR SIX ADDITIONAL YEARS. LABOR SUFFERED PARTICULARLY IGNOMINIOUS DEFEAT IN 1966 ELECTIONS AS RESULT OF ITS VIET-NAM STAND, GETTING ONLY 40 PERCENT OF VOTE, VERSUS ITS AVERAGE OF 46 PERCENT IN NATIONAL ELECTION IN PAST 25 YEARS. LIBERAL PARTY COALITION SKILLFULLY USED VIET-NAM ISSUE TO EXTEND IT TENURE ON POWER, AND WHITLAM HAS NEVER FORGIVEN NON-COMMUNIST GVN FOR MAKING THIS POSSIBLE. NUMEROUS LABOR FIGURES, INCLUDING WHITLAM, LOOK FORWARD WITH SOMETHING AKIN TO PLEASURE AT PROSPECT THEY NOW BELIEVE THEY SEE THAT GVN FACES DEFEAT AND COLLAPSE IN NEAR FUTURE. THIS DEVELOPMENT THEY REGARD AS JUSTIFYING RETROSPECTIVELY EVERYTHING THEY HAVE SAID AND DONE REGARDING VIET-NAM IN PAST 15 YEARS OR SO.

9. HOWEVER, GVN HAS NOT GONE DOWN AS QUICKLY AS WHITLAM

ORIGINALLY ASSUMED, AND HE WAS CAREFUL TO NOTE THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF IT FACES EARLY DEMISE. WHITLAM HAS SOMETHING OF AN OBSESSION ON VIET-NAM. IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR JAN 29 HE ASSESSED HIS OWN PROSPECTS FOR REMAINING IN OFFICE, COMMENTING THAT HE WOULD PROBABLY LAST AT LEAST AS LONG AS PRESIDENT THIEU.

10. IN LAST ANALYSIS, ONLY THE ONWARD COURSE OF EVENTS AND IN PARTICULAR THE CONTINUING SURVIVAL OF THIEU GOVERNMENT OR OF ANTI-COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT ESSENTIALLY LIKE IT WILL HAVE ANY IMPACT ON WHITLAM. AT THIS POINT HE IS UNREMITTINGLY HOSTILE TO GVN, AND HE MADE THIS UNMISTAKEABLY CLEAR AT ALP FEDERAL CONFERENCE. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT DFA PROFESSIONALS DO NOT PARTICULARLY SHARE WHITLAM'S ANTI-GVN VIEWS AND ARE NOT PREPARED TO PREDICT EARLY DEMISE OF GVN. HOWEVER, THEY WILL PROBABLY HAVE ONLY MODEST IMPACT ON AUSTRALIAN POLICY OVER NEXT FEW MONTHS.
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